



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members
FROM: Adrienne Sturup, Interim Director *Adrienne Sturup*
THROUGH: Stephanie Hayden-Howard, Assistant City Manager
DATE: July 9, 2021
SUBJECT: Resolution 20210610-039 Response for Eating Apart Together (EAT) Initiative

City Council passed Resolution 20210610-039 on June 10, 2021, directing the City Manager to address multiple aspects of the community's food system and infrastructure. This memo provides updates on the Eating Apart Together (EAT) initiative.

Background

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, public facilities, private businesses, and nonprofit and faith-based programs were closed or significantly constrained. It became evident that access points and resources for food, water, and other basic necessities for people living unsheltered were critically limited. Under the Social Services Branch of the Austin/Travis County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), the Homeless Group Leads worked with other City departments and community partners to develop and implement the Eating Apart Together (EAT) initiative to address these urgent needs.

EAT deployed multiple strategies for distributing resources, primarily through two methods: 1) offering prepared meals, and 2) delivering bags containing multiple days' worth of shelf-stable food. Distributing EAT bags to individuals where they live has been a key component of the City's infection control strategy during the pandemic, to encourage limited mobility and limited face-to-face interactions, aiming to prevent spread of COVID-19.

During the past 15 months, the EAT Initiative has distributed over one million meals to people experiencing homelessness, as well as drinking water, toilet paper, face coverings, COVID-19 information, hygiene supplies, pet food and other basic needs items.

Changing Community Resources

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting impacts to services, facilities, staffing/volunteers and resources all contributed to a food access crisis for unsheltered residents. Barriers were most severe in the early months of the pandemic and included:





- Closure of meal service programs, food pantries, and restaurants
- Shortages and disruptions to the food supply chain and other supplies (toilet paper, masks, etc.)
- Restaurant access limited to drive-thrus, curbside or delivery, requiring a car or home address
- Income disruptions due to gaps in public benefits, and decreased direct donations
- Volunteer base for nonprofit/faith-based agencies was diminished and/or restricted
- Closures and limited mobility in order to prevent spread of disease

Over the past few months, with vaccinations now available and COVID-19 community indicator levels decreasing, normal operations have resumed in many areas and food access is more readily available. EAT operations, as part of the COVID-19 emergency response, will be significantly reduced, starting in July.

Operational Updates and Changes

For over 13 months, the EAT Distribution Hub operated from either the Palmer Event Center (PEC) or the Austin Convention Center (ACC) while those facilities were available due to closure and cancelation of scheduled events. Hub operations included delivery and distribution of both prepared meals and shelf-stable food bags. As services and facilities began opening up and PEC and ACC were no longer available, arrangements were made for direct delivery of prepared meals to EAT distribution partners. The EAT Hub for shelf-stable food bags was temporarily moved to an Austin Independent School District warehouse to finish out planned operations through the month of June.

The prepared meals portion of EAT will continue through September 2021, with approximately 2,000 meals supplied weekly to partner organizations that provide regular meal service. Most of these partners were providing meal service prior to the pandemic, and along with their regular operations, EAT is able to support expanded food access through these established food access points. Partners have included Angel House, Sunrise, Caritas, Micah 6, Mosaic, St. David's Episcopal, ATX Camp Support, Mobile Loaves & Fishes, and others.

Shelf-stable food distribution planning is focused on the following strategies:

- Supporting/expanding resources of established food access locations
- Exploring new food access sites, to include new or existing partnerships
- Ongoing limited mobile distribution in conjunction with other outreach services

Participating partners are receiving communication about changes. Additionally, a forthcoming press release will provide public notice of updates, as well as highlight the significant impact of the EAT initiative over the past 15 months, and note changing operations as the COVID-19 emergency response operations are scaling down.





If you have any questions or if I can provide additional information, please contact me at (512) 972-5010 or via email at adrienne.sturup@austintexas.gov.

Cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Anne Morgan, Interim Deputy City Manager
Assistant City Managers
Department Directors
Austin/Travis County Emergency Operations Center Incident Commanders

